



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

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CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR BILL DE BLASIO DELIVERS WINTER WEATHER UPDATE

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Okay. Everybody ready? Good morning, everyone. Here at the Office of Emergency Management, I want to thank all of the team that's been here overnight that has been working constantly to address the storm situation. I want to thank all of our first responders, and particularly all the men and women of the sanitation department who have been doing an outstanding job since the early-morning hours addressing this storm.

Now, let me give you a couple of updates immediately. So, the storm projection has increased just in the last hour or so from the National Weather Service. We're now working with an assumption of 20 to 25 inches. And, obviously, we prepare for even worse, so you could see a situation of 25 to 30 inches in a worst case scenario. But, right now, the official estimate from the National Weather Service for New York City is in the 20 to 25 inches range.

As of 10 am, there was already 11.5 inches at Central Park, which is the historic composite measure point for the city, going back literally to the 1800s. So, right now, knowing that this storm is moving very intensely, meaning that the snowfall, the accumulation is very intense at this moment – originally, we were saying, at this point of the day, one to two inches per hour should be assumed, which is a very fast accumulation. We're even hearing estimates now of one to three inches per hour. So, expect very rapidly accumulation – more than in many other storms.

Given those obvious facts and given that we expect that kind of clip to go on even as late as 9 pm or 10 pm tonight, it's quite clear the math speaks for itself. This storm will surpass 20 inches of accumulation in New York City. When that happens, that will put this in the top five snowstorms in the history of New York City – if it goes past 20 inches, it will be in the top five in terms of accumulation literally in our recorded history – goes back to, I think, 1869. So, this is a very big deal, and at this point – National Weather Service – and we certainly agree – thinks it is almost a forgone conclusion that we will pass that 20-inch mark.

That says that people have to take very seriously what's going on here and recognize there's a lot of danger and a lot of disruption that's going to occur because of this storm. We are still in the winter-emergency status that started at 8 am this morning and will continue to at least midnight. We are seriously considering a full travel ban. We've not made that decision yet. That is something we're working very closely with the state of New York on. I just spoke to Governor Cuomo – we're coordinating closely. We'll make that decision in the near-term on a travel ban. So, expect to hear an update even as early as within the next hour.

But given what we're seeing, it is imperative that people get off the roads. Anyone who has taken their car to work really should close down their work and get home now. Anyone who's come into the city from the suburbs should turn around and go back. This is very, very fast accumulation, and I guarantee, if people linger, they will get stuck – it won't be in anyone's interests. Certainly, as we've said, we're going to tow any vehicle that is blocking our snow plows or our emergency vehicles. That will cause a lot of hassle for the owner of that

vehicle and a lot of expense. So, the smart thing to do is – if you have taken your car for any reason, turn around and go home right now – it's as simple as that – because this is bad, and it is getting worse rapidly.

Let me go over some of the other facts – also want to emphasize – very windy. Winds gusts up to 50-plus miles an hour – very windy situation. Again, given that fast, fast accumulation of snow, expect whiteout conditions on the road – incredibly dangerous. Whiteout conditions literally mean the driver cannot see, has no idea what they're about to go into. That's a reason why people want to get their cars home immediately. And, again, wherever you park, get out of the way of emergency vehicles and snow plows. Park in a place that will not obstruct them.

The winter emergency, as I said, continues to at least midnight. At this point, we think the snow will go almost up to that point, in terms of very forceful snow. I want to emphasize that these decisions are going to be made step by step as we get more information, but a couple of new updates we can tell you – as you heard from the governor, MTA buses suspended at noon – so, that's coming right up. Another indication that this storm is worsening in terms of its impact on us – MTA buses will be suspended. So, as we said, I talked to some of the media earlier today and emphasized really as we've gotten more information it's clearer and clearer why people should be off the streets entirely. It makes no sense to be in a car. Even mass transit – although it is still going to be running in terms of the subways, it doesn't make sense to take mass transit unless you have an absolutely urgent reasons, because there will be lots of delays inevitably.

I just to offer a point to my fellow parents. When I was on some of the shows earlier today, the question came – what should parents do about kids who want to go outside? I understand that fully, and a little time out in the snow is not necessarily a bad thing, but, parents, please be very, very careful. It's really difficult out there – the wind, the iciness, the fast accumulating snow. Don't just let your kids go out and spend time unattended. If you want to go out with your kids for a little bit, stay with them, don't go out for long, take very seriously how fast this storm is moving. And, again, I understand fully kids clamoring for fun in the snow, but my best advice is either don't go out or go out very briefly, and keep a very close eye on your kids. There will be time for fun in the snow tomorrow, and going forward, but, right now, this is a fast-moving, intensifying storm, and it should be treated with that respect.

Another update – we can now say for sure that alternate side parking will be cancelled Monday. Obviously, alternate-side parking is canceled today – Saturday. It will definitely be canceled Monday. That's going to obviously be a helpful decision in terms of our drivers knowing that you can park and not have to worry about moving your car on Monday.

A couple of other updates on the coastal flooding concerns we continue to monitor closely. So far, thank God, the estimates we've gotten from the National Weather Service, which are fairly modest, are holding. So, we do not see a major uptick in terms of the flooding, and certainly not anything that threatens life. But, as we said yesterday, the major precautions that were put in places to reinforce dunes and other preventative measures – those are working. We have all the FDNY and NYPD capacity out to be ready to address anything that happens.

Sanitation, again, doing an extraordinary job – you'll hear from the commissioner in a moment. I want to emphasize – you'll hear from several of the commissioners, but one of the things I really want to emphasize – given this fast accumulation of snow, we talked yesterday about the problem of fire hydrants. Again, I am a homeowner too, so, I say to my fellow homeowners, if you have a fire hydrant in front of your house, get out there and keep it clear. It is really important for the whole city, but, for your own self-interest, keep that fire hydrant clear. God forbid the fire department needs to use it, they have to have it clear.

We continue with very strong outreach efforts, looking for anyone who might be in distress. Obviously, the NYPD, FDNY – out in full force; all of our homeless outreach – out in full force; and we're continuing those efforts.

A couple of words in Spanish, and then I want you to hear from some of our commissioners who are doing a great job coordinating this response.

[Mayor de Blasio speaks in Spanish]

I want to note one more point – it's in the Spanish, but I missed it in the English. Again, if there's any problems with heat and hot water, please call 3-1-1. It's going to be hard to get repairs made today, to say the least, but we do need to know if people are not getting heat and hot water so we can respond as quickly as possible.

I'd like you to hear from some of the folks who are leading the response effort – first, the first deputy commissioner of the Office of Emergency Management, Calvin Drayton.

[...]

Mayor: With that, we'll take questions.

Question: First of all, what kind of trouble, if any, have we seen for emergency vehicles, because maybe it's testament to sanitation [inaudible] Upper West Side to here in Downtown Brooklyn, the streets were pretty good.

Mayor: Yeah.

Question: Maybe that's because [inaudible] work or maybe it's because we only have nine inches so far, but what kind of experience have ambulances and emergency vehicles see so far? And what do you expect if we do go over that 20, 25 inch –

Mayor: So, I'll have Commissioner Nigro speak to that, but let me start by saying, it is testament to the extraordinary work of the sanitation department. As you heard Commissioner Garcia say, the storm did come in several hours earlier than originally projected, but they were ready for it, so they had all the assets propositioned, all the shift at full strength. So, this is something we constantly invoke around here – the weather service does an incredible job, but, again, down on the ground here, we have to deal with what really happens – not projections, but what really happens. And if something happens several hours earlier, we have to be ready to respond immediately – sanitation did that. When I came down from Gracie Mansion here to OEM in Brooklyn, I had the same experience you did. I thought sanitation had done a fantastic job. But that fast accumulation is the challenge. Even if they're doing everything perfectly, one inch per hour, two inches per hour, even, at times, three inches per hour – there's only so much that snow plows can handle in such a huge city. So, that's why people have to understand that this is becoming a more intense situation – why it's so important to get out of the way so sanitation can keep doing their work. Commissioner Nigro will speak to the EMS response issue.

Commissioner Daniel Nigro, FDNY: So far, overnight and this morning, we've had five ambulances that were temporarily stuck in the snow, and our vehicles – our fire apparatus, of course, being much larger, do not have that problem – we're able to pull them out. And where they have the problems – are on the side streets. We implore them to stay on the main roads as much as possible, but sometimes they cannot, and there's been a few instances where they've been stuck, but we're doing pretty good.

Mayor: Chief O'Neill.

Chief of Department James O'Neill, NYPD: Right now, our call volume is actually down and we have absolutely no backlog. And just to get back to your question – while it was safe traveling down on the FDR coming down here, it doesn't take much for that to stop. You know, one or two accidents and you're going to jam up major highways. So, again, if you don't need to be out, please stay home.

Question: I just have a question about the news that broke this morning – what do you think about former Mayor Bloomberg running for president?

Mayor: We're not talking about that, we're talking about this emergency.

Question: [inaudible] mentioned ferry and bus service, but what's going on with the trains?

Mayor: Again, right now, most of the subway lines are, from what I'm hearing, running fairly well, especially the underground portions, obviously. But we have to expect further delays on any subway line that has an over-ground element, because this kind of accumulation – again, we've learned this now over the last two years – all of us, together – fast, fast accumulation, it just stands to reason even a lot of snow plows can't keep up if it just constantly keeps piling up so quickly. So, we should expect further delays in the MTA as we go along. We'll keep coordinating closely with the governor and the state – the state obviously runs the MTA. But what we can say safety is, things are moving now, but expect greater delays as the day progresses.

Yes?

Question: Governor Cuomo yesterday described your conversations as bordering on intimate. Would you say –

Mayor: That was obviously some well-deserved humor amidst the challenges we're all facing.

Question: Are things better this year between you two?

Mayor: Again, we're not here to talk about larger issues or personalities.

Question: [inaudible]

Mayor: We're in the middle – on this question, absolutely. We had a series of conversations. Our teams have been taking constantly. I said the other day, we all learned valuable lessons from the last storm, and it taught all of us how to respond better. There's certainly been a lot more coordination and communication. And I think this question of when you decide to make each major new step in the protocol is something that we're working very closely on to get right. That's why at this moment there is a serious discussion going on of a travel ban. Again, we'll come back to you very shortly on that. But what's good is we all have learned how to have the kind of communication we need to have before making a final decision.

Question: What would a travel ban – travel ban mean?

Mayor: It literally means – except for emergency vehicles and authorized personnel – that no one else is allowed on the roads – and that that will be enforced.

Question: And in terms of underground subways, would that mean that people can go into subways?

Mayor: Travel ban refers to roads and vehicles. I would say it's quite obvious people should not be in the subway either for all the reasons we're saying. It's – I want to make it real simple – if you're at work and you can, go home right now. If you're an owner of a store, shut your store. It's just really straightforward – people should realize this is going to be very likely one of the worst snowstorms in our history. The best thing people can do is go home, stay home. The best chance we have of getting back to normal on Monday, is if people get back to home and let everyone here and their employees do their job.

Anyone else? Last questions – going once – yes?

Question: And obviously there's a lot of snow – any safety advice? Or anything for all the kids that want to play in the snow?

Mayor: Yeah. As I said, I really want to emphasize to my fellow parents – I feel your pain, to say the least, if your kids are clamoring to go outside. I've been there many, many times. What I say is, look, if you have backyard or if kids can play right in front of your house, that's great. But I would not have kids going very far from the home. If you want to go really quickly to someplace near your home, stay with your kids – adult supervision necessary. This is a vastly intensifying storm and it's slippery, it's gusty. I, as a parent, wouldn't let my kids out of my sight. So, if you want to get the a little bit of air, a little bit of running around, keep your eyes on them, keep it as minimal as possible, get them back inside. But what my kids at a certain age would have done – they would have gone off to the park sledding and all, and I wouldn't have thought there's a problem in that – not today – not today. I would not let them out of my sight if I'm a parent.

Yes?

Question: Is there a chance that underground subways might be shut –

Mayor: Conceivable – I mean, again, this is going in stages. I think, you know, we've had a very full conversation with the governor and the MTA. At this point, there is not an impulse to an MTA closure. I think, again, a travel ban for the roads is more likely than an MTA closure. But this is an hour-to-hour thing. Again, I want everyone to hear we're in a very different situation than we were last night, and we're even in a different situation than we were at the beginning of the morning. The latest estimates show both an intensification of the number of inches to expect and the speed with which it's coming in. So, over 20 inches makes us one of the top five snowstorms in New York City history, going back to 1869. There is chance to get to 25 or even 30 inches, so the best way for people to think about this is – we're going into uncharted territory here, and it would not be shocking, again, to go to a travel ban, or maybe even an MTA closure. But that latter decision is going to be done very, very carefully in consultation with the state.

Yes?

Question: Just a follow-up to that, would you guys give like an hour – two-hours notice [inaudible]?

Mayor: Yes. Absolutely, we would give at least a couple of hours. I don't want to speak for the state and the MTA – they have to make that ultimate decision. On a travel ban, we would give a couple of hours notice.

Anything else? Yes?

Question: One last question – would you have to hit a certain inch-count before you have a travel ban?

Mayor: It's a little more subtle than that. I think it's less about the total number of inches and more about the speed of accumulation. And, again, this latest information that went from one to two inches per hour, to one to three inches per hour has got our full attention. Commissioner Garcia is constantly talking to her team all over the city and getting feedback on how the plowing operations are going. The most important thing from my point of view is if Commissioner Garcia says the plows are really starting to bog down because of any traffic out there, or Chief O'Neill or Commissioner Nigro say emergency vehicles are having trouble moving because of traffic – that will precipitate a travel ban. So, if anyone want's to make it easier on all these people, go home right now. Get your cars off the road – and that's what we really need everyone to do.

Okay. Thanks very much, everyone.

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